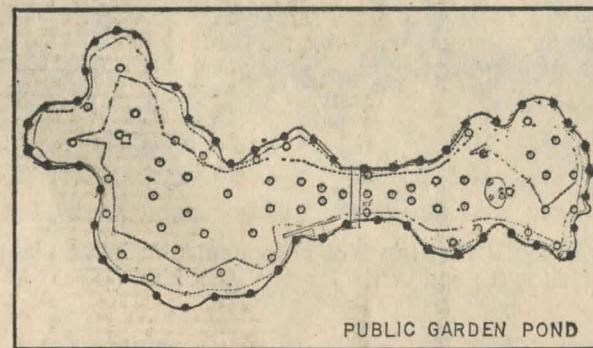




POOLS OF LIGHT DOT THE PUBLIC GARDEN POND SURFACE (Bob Dean Photo)



PLACEMENT OF LIGHTS (white circles) and speakers (black circles) for PULSA demonstration.

Hub Public Garden 'Turns On'

By WILLIAM A. DAVIS

Staff Reporter

With beeps, blips, hisses, and an occasional clunk, "environmental programming" came to staid old Boston Public Garden on Wednesday night.

On the artificial pond where Swan Boats sail, random patterns of light streaked across the water's surface from hidden batteries of strobe lights, while high-fidelity speakers projected the eerie sounds of electronic music through the usually still park.

It was the start of a 19-day experiment in the use of light and sound to enliven urban areas. The project is financed by private electronics firms and the Federal government with the enthusiastic endorsement of Boston Park Comr. John Warner.

The experiment is being conducted by PULSA, a team of seven shaggy-haired and enthusiastic Yale research fellows from a plywood shed on the Swan Boat dock that houses a jungle of some eight miles of wire and cable.

The idea, says Michael Cain, one of the research workers, is to take light and sound natural to a city and weave them into a pattern that is random but pleasing. "We want to use the environment as a medium," he said.

The 55 strobe lights and speakers scattered over and under the pond area are controlled by a central computer which will program a nightly sound and light show from sunset to 10 p.m.

"We'll change the show each night," said David Rumsey, another Yale fellow. Not only will the light and sound patterns change but the plan is to mix in a human element by selecting and amplifying comments picked up on hidden microphones.

The comments may have to be carefully selected.

The show, extensively advertised by posters in the Beacon Hill, Back Bay and Cambridge areas, got off to a late start because of a technical failure in the computer.

A crowd of about 100 persons stood patiently on the bridge over the pond — rewarded by an occasional loud "bleep" or flash of light — while harrassed technicians frantically manipulated spaghetti-like coils of wire.

Slowly, as the Yale men began working the computer by hand, the single "beeps" became a chorus, soon joined by ensembles of "blips", quartets of "pings" and solo "clunks".

"It's an electronic song," said Jonathan Herndon, a Franklin Institute student who volunteered to help PULSA rig its equipment.

The public's reaction was typical of an opening night — mixed.

"It's out of sight," said one young man in a long, black cape, "It's like God talking to us through electronics."

"It sounds like the television set when the kids have broken the antenna," said a middle aged woman crossing the bridge.

At the edge of the pond, the show's sponsors put up a blackboard where passers-by could record their comments.

One soberly-dressed Bostonian puffed on his pipe for a few moments as he listened to the sounds and watched the flashing lights.

Then he walked over to the blackboard and wrote: "Oh, No."